



Saudi Arabia

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Saudi Arabia is a monarchy without elected representative institutions or political parties. It is ruled by King Fahd bin Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud, a son of King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud, who unified the country in the early 20th century. A 1992 royal decree reserved for the King exclusive power to name the Crown Prince. Since the death of King Abd Al-Aziz, the King and Crown Prince have been chosen from among his sons. Crown Prince Abdullah has played an increasing role in governance since King Fahd suffered a stroke in 1995. The Government has declared the Islamic holy book the Koran and the Sunna (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad to be the country's Constitution. The Government bases its legitimacy on governance according to the precepts of a rigorously conservative form of Islam. Neither the Government nor the society in general accepted the concept of separation of religion and state. The Government prohibited the establishment of political parties and suppressed opposition views. In 1992 King Fahd appointed a Consultative Council, or Majlis Ash-Shura, and similar provincial assemblies. The Majlis, an increasingly influential appointed consultative body, began holding sessions in 1993 and was expanded first in 1997 and again in 2001. The judiciary, though subject to influence by government officials, was reportedly becoming slightly more independent.

The Government maintained control of the various security forces. Police and border forces under the Ministry of Interior were responsible for internal security. Also subordinate to the Ministry of Interior were the Mubahith, or internal security force, and the elite special forces. The Committee to Prevent Vice and Promote Virtue, whose agents commonly were known as Mutawwa'in, or religious police, was a semiautonomous agency that enforced adherence to Islamic norms by monitoring public behavior. The Crown Prince controlled the National Guard. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Aviation, Prince Sultan, was responsible for all the military forces. Members of the security forces committed serious human rights abuses.

The population was approximately 22.1 million. The oil industry was the basis of the transformation of the country from a pastoral, agricultural, and trading society to a rapidly urbanizing one, characterized by large-scale infrastructure projects, an extensive social welfare system, and a labor market comprised largely of foreign workers. Oil and gas revenues accounted for approximately 35 to 40 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 75 percent of government income. Agriculture accounted for approximately 6 percent of GDP. Government spending accounted for 37 percent of GDP. Approximately 40 percent of the economy was nominally private, and the Government was promoting further privatization of the economy. Since 1995 the Government has aggressively campaigned to increase the number of citizens in the public and private work forces.

The Government's human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained. Citizens did not have the right or the legal means to change their government. Security forces continued to abuse detainees and prisoners, arbitrarily arrest and detain persons, and hold them in incommunicado detention. Security forces committed torture. In 2001 the Council of Ministers approved a new law regarding punitive measures that would forbid harming detainees and to allow those accused of crimes to hire a lawyer or legal agent. On May 1, the new Saudi Criminal Procedural Law went into effect. Prolonged detention without charge was a problem. Security forces committed such abuses, in contradiction to the law, but with the acquiescence of the Government. The Mutawwa'in continued to intimidate, abuse, and detain citizens and foreigners. Most trials were closed, and defendants usually appeared before judges without legal counsel. The Government infringed on citizens' privacy rights. The Government prohibited or restricted freedom of speech, the press, assembly, association, religion, and movement. However, during the year, the Government continued to tolerate a wider range of debate and criticism in the press concerning domestic issues. Discrimination and violence against women, discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, and strict limitations on worker rights continued.

The Government viewed its interpretation of Islamic law as its sole source of guidance on human rights and disagreed with internationally accepted definitions of human rights. However, in the past and during the year, the Government initiated limited measures to participate in international human rights activities, such as its welcome in October of the visit of the U.N. Human Rights envoy following the Government's implementation in May of its new bill of rights Criminal Procedure Code, which the Government claimed would address some of its obligations under the Convention Against Torture or Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

The Government executed persons for criminal offenses after closed trials in which forced confessions were common. A few procedural safeguards were provided through the new Criminal Procedural Law, though there was little evidence of its actual implementation (see Sections 1.c. and 1.e.).

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Shar'ia (Islamic law) prohibits any judge from accepting a confession obtained under duress; however, there were credible reports that the authorities abused detainees, both citizens and foreigners. Ministry of Interior officials were responsible for most incidents of abuse of prisoners, including beatings, whippings, sleep deprivation, and at least three cases of drugging of foreign prisoners. In addition, there were allegations of torture, including allegations of beatings with sticks, suspension from bars by handcuffs, and threats against family members. Torture and abuse were used to obtain required confessions from prisoners (see Section 1.e.). There were reports that in detention centers some boys and young men were flogged, forced constantly to lie on hard floors, deprived of sleep, and threatened with whipping and other abuse.

The Government has refused to recognize the mandate of the U.N. Committee Against Torture to investigate alleged abuses, although it has invited the committee to visit the country. However, the Government has pledged to cooperate with U.N. human rights mechanisms and announced in 2000 the establishment of a committee to investigate allegations of torture pursuant to its obligations under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (see Section 4). At year's end, there was no indication that the committee had begun functioning.

In October the Government welcomed the visit of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, the first ever from the U.N. Commission for Human Rights, and allowed the U.N. Human Rights lawyer and his team to examine its criminal and civil laws, courts, and prisons. The Government's past failure to criticize human rights abuses has contributed to the public perception that security forces may commit abuses with impunity.

The Mutawwa'in continued to intimidate, harass, abuse, and detain citizens and foreigners of both sexes. They also brought citizens to police for detention. Throughout the year, both citizens and foreigners reported incidents of intimidation, harassment, and detention by the Mutawwa'in (see Sections 1.d. and 1.f.).

The Government punished criminals according to its interpretation of Shari'a. Punishments included flogging, amputation, and execution by beheading, stoning, or firing squad. At year's end, authorities acknowledged 43 executions, significantly lower than the 81 in the previous year. Executions were for killing, narcotics-related offenses, rape, and armed robbery. In accordance with Shari'a, the authorities may punish repeated thievery and other repeated offenses by amputation of the right hand and left foot. Persons convicted of political or religious crimes reportedly were flogged with a leather strap. Persons convicted of less serious offenses, such as alcohol-related offenses or being alone in the company of an unrelated person of the opposite sex, sometimes were punished by caning.

Prison and jail conditions varied. Prisons reportedly generally met internationally accepted standards and allegedly provided air-conditioned cells, good nutrition, regular exercise, and careful patrolling by prison guards. In October the Government received the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and allowed him access to prisons. During his visit, the Government again publicized its intention to form a human rights committee, though no details were forthcoming at year's end. Some police stations, deportation centers, and jails, nonetheless, were overcrowded, unsanitary, and not air-conditioned. Authorities generally allowed family members access to detainees, but in some cases only after holding detainees for a significant period of time.

In 1992 King Fahd established regional Boards of Investigation and Public Prosecution. The members of these boards had the right to inspect prisons, review prisoners' files, and hear their complaints. However, the Government did not yet permit NGO human rights monitors to visit prisons or jails.

Representatives of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were present at the Rafha refugee camp, which

houses former Iraqi prisoners of war and civilians who fled Iraq following the Gulf War. According to UNHCR officials, there was no systematic abuse of refugees by camp guards. When isolated instances of abuse surfaced in the past, the authorities were responsive and willing to investigate allegations and reprimand or remove offending guards. The camp received a high level of material assistance and was generally comfortable and well run. The Government previously confined refugees to the camp, except in the event of approved emigration (see Section 2.d.); however, during the year, refugees were permitted to visit the town of Rafha to shop. During the year, the Government began working with the UNHCR to make arrangements for Rafha refugees to gain employment in the Rafha area.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the authorities at times arrested and detained persons without following explicit legal guidelines. The Mutawwa'in generally were free to intimidate and bring to police stations persons whom they accused of committing "crimes of vice" based on their own religious interpretations. There were few existing formal procedures to safeguard against abuse, although the Government claimed that it punished individual officers who violate regulations. There have been few publicized cases of citizens successfully obtaining judicial redress for abuse of the Government's power of arrest and detention. In February the press reported that at least one Court of Grievances ordered the police department in Jeddah to pay compensation to one Arab expatriate for detaining him illegally for 2 months.

According to regulation, authorities may not detain suspects for longer than 3 days before charging them. However, serious exceptions have been reported. In practice persons were held weeks or months and sometimes longer. The regulations also provided for bail for less serious crimes, although authorities at times released detainees on the recognizance of a patron or sponsoring employer without the payment of bail. If they were not released, authorities typically detained accused persons for an average of 2 months before sending the case to trial or, in the case of some foreigners, summarily deporting them. There were no established procedures providing detainees the right to inform their family of their arrest.

The Mutawwa'in have the authority to detain persons for no more than 24 hours for violations of the strict standards of proper dress and behavior. In the past, they sometimes exceeded this limit before delivering detainees to the police (see Section 1.f.). Mutawwa'in reportedly in practice handed over detainees to police within the 24-hour period; however, in some cases police held prisoners for longer periods, depending on the offense. Procedures required a police officer to accompany the Mutawwa'in at the time of an arrest. Mutawwa'in generally complied with this requirement. During the year, in the more conservative Riyadh district, reports continued of Mutawwa'in accosting, abusing, arresting, and detaining persons alleged to have violated dress and behavior standards.

The Mutawwa'in reportedly detained young men for offenses that included eating in restaurants with young women, making lewd remarks to women in the shopping malls, or walking in groups through family-only sections of shopping centers. Women of many nationalities were detained for actions such as riding in a taxi with a man who was not their relative, appearing with their heads uncovered in shopping malls, and eating in restaurants with males who were not their relatives. Many such prisoners were held for days, sometimes weeks, without officials notifying their families or, in the case of foreigners, their embassies.

The Government continued to detain Christians, at times for holding services and at times apparently arbitrarily (see Section 2.c.).

During the year, the Government reportedly detained a number of Shi'a sheikhs (religious leaders)(see Section 2.c.).

Early in the year, the Government arrested six leaders of the Ismaili Shi'ite sect in Najran. They continued to be detained along with a reported 93 others held since the protests there. On December 3, King Fahd commuted the death penalty for 17 citizens arrested during the Najran riots to 10 years in prison and lowered the sentence from 10 to 5 years for many of the others arrested. On December 24, the Government released an elderly Ismaili religious leader, Hajj Mohammed Al-Saadi, held in a maximum security prison since the riots in 2000. He was among those whose sentences were reduced in the King's Ramadan pardon in early December.

Political detainees who are arrested by the General Directorate of Investigation (GDI), the Ministry of Interior's security service (Mubahith), commonly were held incommunicado in special prisons during the initial phase of an investigation, which may last weeks or months. The GDI allowed the detainees only limited contact with their families or lawyers.

The authorities may detain without charge persons who publicly criticize the Government, or may charge them with attempting to destabilize the Government (see Sections 2.a. and 3). In late January, in celebration of King Fahd's 20 years of rule and the holy month of Ramadan, the Minister of Interior announced the release of 13,768 prisoners serving time for minor offenses, including 8,905 citizens and 4,863 foreigners.

The Government continued to commit abuses against members of the Shi'a minority. The Government reportedly continued to detain an unknown number of Shi'a who were arrested in the aftermath of the 1996 Al-Khobar bombing. Government security forces reportedly arrested Shi'a based on the smallest suspicion, held them in custody for lengthy periods, and then released them without explanation. In February the Government released Sheikh Al-Ghanim after detention for nearly 2 years; however, 16 Shi'a remained in prison at year's end.

During the year, the Public Security Department in Jeddah announced its commitment to discourage abuse by security forces through the establishment of hotlines (including telephone and fax numbers and an e-mail address) for use by the general public. These new hotlines will allow the public the opportunity to complain about any breach of law by security personnel and to report abuse by police officers. The director of Public Security in Jeddah said a special task force had been set up in the department to act on complaints and proposals from the public. The Jeddah Public Security Department also promised to compensate all proven violations made by security personnel against any citizen or expatriate.

There was no reliable information about the total number of political detainees.

The Government did not use forced exile; however, it previously has revoked the citizenship of opponents of the Government who reside outside the country (see Section 3).

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The independence of the judiciary is prescribed by law and was generally respected in practice; however, judges occasionally acceded to the influence of the executive branch, high-ranking members of the royal family and their associates, who were not required to appear before the courts. Judges are appointed by the Justice Ministry and confirmed by the Royal Diwan (Royal Court). The Ministry exercised judicial, financial, and administrative control of the courts. The Supreme Judicial Council, whose members appointed by the King, may discipline or remove judges.

The legal system is based on Shari'a. Shari'a courts exercise jurisdiction over common criminal cases and civil suits regarding marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Such jurisdiction extends to non-Muslims for crimes committed in the country. Shari'a courts base judgments largely on their interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna. Cases involving relatively small penalties were tried in Shari'a summary courts. More serious crimes were adjudicated in Shari'a courts of common pleas. Appeals from Shari'a courts were made to the courts of appeal.

Other civil proceedings, including those involving claims against the Government and enforcement of foreign judgments, were held before specialized administrative tribunals, such as the Commission for the Settlement of Labor Disputes and the Board of Grievances.

The Government permitted Shi'a Muslims to use their own legal tradition to adjudicate noncriminal cases within their community. There was no comparable right for non-Muslims or foreigners, whose cases were handled in regular Shari'a courts.

The military justice system has jurisdiction over uniformed personnel and civil servants that are charged with violations of military regulations. The Minister of Defense and Aviation and the King review the decisions of courts-martial.

The Supreme Judicial Council is not a court and may not reverse decisions made by a court of appeals. However, the Council may review lower court decisions and refer them back to the lower court for reconsideration.

The Council of Senior Religious Scholars is an autonomous body of 20 senior religious jurists, including the Minister of Justice. It establishes the legal principles to guide lower-court judges in deciding cases.

On May 1, the November 2001 Saudi Criminal Procedural Law, went into effect. Reported by the press as a bill of rights, the 225-article law reportedly was part of a plan to restructure court procedures. The approval of the bill followed the Government's decision to allow persons under investigation the right to a lawyer and to permit lawyers to present arguments in criminal courts. In May, following the announcement of the new law's implementation, the Justice Minister issued a public statement announcing his instructions to courts and judges to inform convicts of their right to appeal rulings. According to knowledgeable attorneys there is no evidence yet of the law's implementation.

There were reports during the year that the authorities tortured detainees and pressured them to confess by isolation, blindfolding, and drugging over a period of weeks.

A woman's testimony does not carry the same weight as that of a man. In a Shari'a court, the testimony of one man equals that of two women.

Female parties to court proceedings such as divorce and family law cases generally must deputize male relatives to speak on their behalf. In the absence of two witnesses, or four witnesses in the case of adultery, confessions before a judge almost always were required for criminal conviction—a situation that repeatedly has led prosecuting authorities to coerce confessions from suspects by threats and abuse (see Section 1.c.).

Sentencing was not uniform. Laws and regulations state that defendants should be treated equally; however, under Shari'a as interpreted and applied in the country, crimes against Muslims received harsher penalties than those against non-Muslims. In the case of wrongful death, the amount of indemnity or "blood money" awarded to relatives varied with the nationality, religion, age, and sex of the victim. A sentence may be changed at any stage of review, except for punishments stipulated by the Koran. Provincial governors have the authority to exercise leniency and reduce a judge's sentence. In general members of the royal

family and other powerful families were not subject to the same rule of law as ordinary citizens. For example, judges did not have the power to issue a warrant summoning any member of the royal family.

The King and his advisors reviewed cases involving capital punishment. The King has the authority to commute death sentences and grant pardons, except for capital crimes committed against individuals. In such cases, he may request the victim's next of kin to pardon the killer—usually in return for compensation from the family or the King.

There was insufficient information to determine the number of political prisoners. The Government did not provide information regarding such persons or respond to inquiries about them. It did not allow access to political prisoners by international humanitarian organizations. Moreover, the Government conducted closed trials for persons who may have been political prisoners and in other cases has detained persons incommunicado for long periods while under investigation. Amnesty International previously estimated the number of political prisoners to be between 100 and 200; however, there were no current or reliable figures available.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The sanctity of family life and the inviolability of the home are among the most fundamental of Islamic precepts. The Government infringed on these rights. Royal decrees include provisions calling for the Government to defend the home from unlawful intrusions, while laws and regulations prohibit officials from intercepting mail and electronic communication except when necessary during criminal investigations. Nonetheless, there were few procedural safeguards against government interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence.

The police generally must demonstrate reasonable cause and obtain permission from the provincial governor before searching a private home; however, warrants are not required by law.

Customs officials routinely opened mail and shipments to search for contraband, including material deemed pornographic and non-Muslim religious material. Customs officials confiscated or censored materials considered offensive, including Christian Bibles and religious videotapes (see Section 2.c.). The authorities also opened mail and used informants and wiretaps in internal security and criminal matters. Security forces used wiretaps against foreigners suspected of alcohol-related offenses. Informants and an informal system of ward bosses in some districts reported "seditious ideas," antigovernment activity, or behavior contrary to Islam in their neighborhoods to the Ministry of the Interior.

The Government enforced most social and Islamic religious norms, the Government's interpretation of which are matters of law (see Section 5). Women may not marry noncitizens without government permission; men must obtain government permission to marry noncitizen women outside the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. In accordance with Shari'a, women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims; men may marry Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims. Marriages between Sunni and Shi'a citizens were discouraged, and any such marriages generally were made formal officiated in ceremonies in the neighboring country of Bahrain.

In March the Government announced new restrictions against citizens marrying foreigners. The Council of Ministers passed a law barring top civil servants and security officials from marrying foreigners without permission from the King. The list included ministers, judges, employees in the Royal Court and Cabinet, Majlis Ash-Shura members, diplomats and administrative staff in the Foreign Ministry, civil servants posted overseas, chairmen of boards of private companies, staff of the Defense Ministry, National Guard, internal security, intelligence service, public prosecution and customs. According to press reports, citizens who married foreigners without prior authorization no longer would qualify for any of those jobs. The marital restrictions also applied to citizens studying overseas. Violators risked disciplinary action, including being fired from their jobs and even trial.

Mutawwa'in practices and incidents of abuse varied widely in different regions of the country, but they were most numerous in the central Nejd region. In certain areas, both the Mutawwa'in and religious vigilantes acting on their own harassed, abused, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners (see Section 1.d.). The Government requires the Mutawwa'in to follow established procedures and to offer instruction in a polite manner; however, Mutawwa'in did not always comply with the requirements. During the year, the Government neither criticized publicly abuses by Mutawwa'in and religious vigilantes nor sought to curtail such abuses.

Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior included the closing of commercial establishments during the five daily prayer observances, insisting upon compliance with strict norms of public dress, and dispersing gatherings of women in public places designated for men, as well as preventing men from entering public places designated for families. Mutawwa'in frequently reproached citizen and foreign women for failure to observe strict dress codes and arrested men and women found together who were not married or closely related.

Local media emphasized remarks made by the Interior Minister during a November visit to the Riyadh headquarters of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The Minister called on the Mutawwa'in to respect the sanctity of private homes and refrain from activity that could be construed as prying or harassing citizens. According to credible sources, incidents with Mutawwa'in usually increased during Ramadan because many feel they have added license to assert their authority during the holy month.

Some professors believed that informers monitor comments made in university classrooms and reported them to government authorities.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Government severely limited freedom of speech and the press; however, the Government continued to relax restrictions somewhat during the year. The authorities did not permit criticism of Islam or the ruling family, and criticism of the Government was rare. However, in November the press reported debate over religious matters. The press published critical commentary about religious authorities segregating women in the Grand Mosque in Mecca and temporarily restricting access for women from certain areas of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. On November 15, one female citizen journalist described discrimination against female pilgrims in an article in the Arab News stating "I will continue writing about this until the authorities listen to what I have to say."

The authorities allowed the press some freedom to criticize governmental bodies and social policies through editorial comments and cartoons. For example, editors allowed publication of sensational stories of citizen experiences abroad. Also during the year, both Arabic and English newspapers reported on domestic problems, such as abuse of women, servants, and children, previously not addressed by the media. Persons whose criticisms aligned them with an organized political opposition were subject to arrest and detention until they confessed to a crime or signed a statement promising not to resume such criticisms, which was tantamount to a confession.

On occasion the Government provided direction to mosque orators and imams regarding the content of their messages; in some instances the Government has banned imams from speaking for political comments that they made (see Section 2.c.).

The print media were privately owned but publicly subsidized. A media policy statement and a national security law prohibit the dissemination of criticism of the Government. The media policy statement urged journalists to uphold Islam, oppose atheism, promote Arab interests, and preserve cultural heritage. The Ministry of Information appointed, and may remove, all editors in chief. It also provided guidelines to newspapers regarding controversial issues. The Government owned the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), which expressed official government views.

In 2001 the Council of Ministers approved a new press law establishing a journalists' association for citizens to address wages, benefits, and relations with management. In February the Government announced that journalists could now begin to form their own press association as approved by the Council of Ministers.

Newspapers typically published news on sensitive subjects, such as crime or terrorism, only after the information was released by the SPA or when a senior government official had authorized it. Two Saudi-owned, London-based dailies, Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat and Al-Hayat, were distributed widely and read in the country. Both newspapers tended to practice self-censorship in order to comply with government restrictions on sensitive issues.

The authorities dictated to domestic newspapers when they are allowed to release stories about the country that are based on stories in the foreign press. The authorities also continued on occasion to censor stories about the country in foreign publications. Censors removed or blackened offending articles, glued pages together, or prevented certain issues of foreign publications from entering the market. However, while this occurred, it was not consistent and frequently controversial articles appeared in foreign publications that were distributed. During the year, the Ministry of Information continued to relax its blackout policy regarding politically sensitive news concerning the country reported in the international media, although press restrictions regarding domestic reporting remained stringent. Access by citizens to outside sources of information, such as Arabic and Western satellite television channels and the Internet, was increasingly widespread.

In the past, the Government has restricted the entry of foreign journalists. However, during the year, it granted visas to a large number of international media professionals. The Government allowed foreign journalists and photographers, both male and female, to travel widely and to interview. However, in one instance, authorities confiscated videotapes and a laptop computer from one reporter. Authorities gave no reason for confiscating the material.

In March local newspapers publicized public outrage at the fire in the Mecca girls' school. The Government issued a report to the press and the media reported eyewitness accounts from the scene. The resultant public outcry resulted in the dissolution of the separate and religiously controlled Presidency for Girls' Education and the incorporation of female education into the Ministry of Education.

Government interference with the press continued. In March an editor was fired for criticizing judges. In May the Government forced the firing of the editor of Al-Watan for criticizing religious judges.

The Government owned and operated the television and radio companies. Government censors removed any reference to politics, religions other than Islam, pork or pigs, alcohol, and sex from foreign programs and songs. There were several million satellite-receiving dishes in the country, which provided citizens with foreign broadcasts.

The Government banned all books, magazines, and other materials that it considered sexual or pornographic in nature. The Ministry of Information compiled and updated a list of publications that were prohibited from being sold in the country.

The Government censored all forms of public artistic expression and prohibited cinemas and public musical or theatrical performances, except those that are considered folkloric.

Access to the Internet was available legally only through local servers, which the Government monitored closely. There were as many as one million Internet subscribers. Some citizens attempted to circumvent this control by accessing the Internet through servers in other countries. The Government attempted to block all Web sites that it deemed sexual, pornographic, politically offensive, or "un-Islamic." However, such Web sites were accessible from within the country. In 2001 the Government closed a number of Internet cafes, especially those established for women, after complaints that the cafes were being used for "immoral purposes."

Academic freedom was restricted. For example, the authorities prohibited the study of evolution, Freud, Marx, Western music, and Western philosophy. Informers monitored their classroom comments and reported to government and religious authorities.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Shari'a does not address freedom of assembly, but the Government strictly limited freedom of assembly in practice. It prohibited public demonstrations as a means of political expression. Public meetings were segregated by sex. Unless sponsored by diplomatic missions or approved by the appropriate governor, foreign residents who seek to hold unsegregated meetings risked arrest and deportation. The authorities monitored any large gatherings of persons, especially of women. The Mutawwa'in dispersed groups of women found in public places, such as restaurants. Government policy permits women to attend cultural and social events at diplomatic chanceries and residences only if they are accompanied by a father, brother, or husband. However, in practice police often implemented the policy arbitrarily. On some occasions during the year, authorities actively prohibited women from entering diplomatic chanceries or residences to attend cultural events and lectures.

Shari'a does not address freedom of association, and the Government strictly limited freedom of association in practice. The Government prohibited the establishment of political parties or any type of opposition group (see Section 3). By its power to license associations, the Government ensured that groups conform to public policy. The Government licensed a large number of humanitarian organizations and tribal and professional societies, such as the Saudi Chemists Society and the Saudi Pharmacists Society. The Government claimed that such groups operate without government interference because they were not detrimental to public security.

The Government maintained its position that public demonstrations were not allowed; however, a small number of public demonstrations occurred. On April 5, protesters demonstrated outside a foreign Consulate in Dhahran. On April 8, university students protested outside Jeddah's King Abd al-Aziz University in support of the Palestinians. The Government peacefully dispersed the crowds. Authorities prevented the holding of other public demonstrations and, according to several reports, used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrators in the Eastern Province town of Qatif.

c. Freedom of Religion

Freedom of religion did not exist. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims.

The Government prohibited non-Islamic public worship. The Government recognized the right of non-Muslims to worship in private; however, it did not always respect this right in practice. Conversion by a Muslim to another religion was considered apostasy. Public apostasy is a crime under Shari'a and punishable by death. There were no executions for apostasy during the year, and no reports of any such executions for the past several years.

Islamic practice generally was limited to that of the Wahhabi order, which adhered to the Hanbali school of the Sunni branch of Islam as interpreted by Muhammad Ibn Al-Wahab, a puritanical 18th century religious reformer. The spreading of Muslim teachings not in conformity with the officially accepted interpretation of Islam was prohibited. However, there were significant numbers of Sufis in the western province who engaged in technically illegal practices, such as celebrating the Mawlid, or Prophet's birthday, more or less openly without government interference. The practice of other schools of Sunni Islam was discouraged, and there was institutionalized discrimination against adherents of the Shi'a branch of Islam.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs directly supervised, and was a major source of funds for the construction and maintenance of most mosques in the country. The Ministry paid the salaries of imams (prayer leaders) and others who worked in the mosques. On occasion the Government provided direction to mosque orators and imams regarding the content of their messages; in some instances, imams were banned from speaking. A governmental committee was responsible for defining the qualifications of imams. The Mutawwa'in received their funding from the Government and were government employees. The General President of the Mutawwa'in held the rank of cabinet minister. Mutawwa'in and imams were trained at the Imam Mohammed University outside of Riyadh and also at the Umm Al-Qura University in Mecca.

Foreign imams were barred from leading worship during the most heavily attended prayer times and prohibited from delivering

sermons during Friday congregational prayers. The Government stated that its actions were part of its "Saudiization" plan to replace foreign workers with citizens. The spreading of Muslim teachings not in conformance with the officially accepted interpretation of Islam was prohibited. Writers and other individuals who publicly criticized this interpretation, including both those who advocated a stricter interpretation and those who favored a more moderate interpretation than the Government's, were imprisoned and faced other reprisals.

The Shi'a Muslim minority (approximately 900,000 of approximately 14 million citizens) lived mostly in the Eastern Province, although a significant number also resided in Medina in the western province. Its members were the objects of officially sanctioned political, social, and economic discrimination (see Section 5).

The authorities permitted the celebration of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura in the eastern province city of Qatif, provided that the celebrants did not undertake large, public marches or engage in self-flagellation (a traditional Shi'a practice). The celebrations were monitored by the police. No other Ashura celebrations were permitted in the country, and many Shi'a traveled to Qatif or to Bahrain to participate in Ashura celebrations. The Government continued to enforce other restrictions on the Shi'a community, such as banning Shi'a books.

According to various reports, the Government arrested and detained a number of Shi'a sheikhs (religious leaders) in 2000 and during the year. Early in 2000, a Shi'a sheikh was taken into custody, and three other sheikhs were arrested for unknown reasons near the border with Jordan. Credible human rights organizations reported that at least seven additional Shi'a religious leaders reportedly remained in detention for violating restrictions on Shi'a religious practices. In March 2000, Mubahith officers reportedly arrested and detained Sheikh Mohammed Al Amri in Medina. In April 2000, Hashim Al-Sayyid Al-Sada, a Shi'a cleric suspected of political or religious dissent, was arrested in his home and reportedly remained in incommunicado detention at year's end (see Section 1.d.). In February Sheikh Aliban Ali al-Ghanim who was arrested in August 2000 was released.

The Government seldom permitted private construction of Shi'a mosques. The Shi'a have declined Government offers to build state-supported mosques because the Government would prohibit the incorporation and display of Shi'a motifs in any such mosques.

In 2000 rioting by Makrama Ismaili Shi'as in Najran led to an attack by an armed group of Shi'a on a hotel that contained an office of the regional governor. Security forces responded, leading to extended gun battles between the two sides. In December the Government stated that 1 member of the security forces was killed in Najran and that King Fahd commuted the death sentence for 17 of the anti-government insurrectionists.

Early this year in Najran, 6 leaders of the Ismaili Shiite sect were arrested and continued to be detained along with a reported 93 others held since the protests in 2000. In 2001 all six persons were known to have met with a foreign journalist visiting Najran. By year's end, there were 102 minority Ismailis reportedly still in prison in Najran.

Magic is widely believed in and sometimes practiced, often in the form of fortune telling and swindles. However, under Shari'a the practice of magic is regarded as the worst form of polytheism, an offense for which no repentance is accepted, and which is punishable by death. There were an unknown number of detainees held in prison on the charge of "sorcery," or the practice of "black magic" or "witchcraft." In a few cases, self-proclaimed "miracle workers" were executed for sorcery involving physical harm or apostasy. The press reported that police arrested persons accused of sorcery. Based on vague accounts and lack of definition of sorcery included in the crime reports, the charges appeared to be based on hearsay and neighbors' reports of alleged misdeeds. There was no information available on prison time or punishment.

The Government prohibited public non-Muslim religious activities. Non-Muslim worshippers risked arrest, lashing, and deportation for engaging in overt religious activity that attracts official attention. The Government has stated publicly, including before the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, that its policy is to protect the right of non-Muslims to worship privately. During the year, senior officials in the Government reaffirmed to a visiting religious delegation the right of non-Muslims to engage in private religious worship. However, it did not provide explicit guidelines -such as the number of persons permitted to attend and acceptable locations -for determining what constitutes private worship, which made distinctions between public and private worship unclear. Such lack of clarity, as well as instances of arbitrary enforcement by the authorities, forced most non-Muslims to worship in such a manner as to avoid discovery by the Government or others. Those detained for non-Muslim worship almost always were deported by authorities after sometimes lengthy periods of arrest during investigation.

At year's end, there were no reports that Christians detained for practicing their religion remained in prisons. During the year, there were a few raids, arrests, and detentions of Christians throughout the country. In early January, three Ethiopian Christians, detained in 2001 in Jeddah in connection with an investigation into a Christian worship group, alleged in a well-circulated e-mail that they were tortured, submitted to severe punishment and physical abuse. Later in the year the three were released and deported. In March 2 Filipino Christians, imprisoned in Dammam for conducting a Roman Catholic prayer group in their home, were sentenced to 150 lashes and deportation following a 30-day jail sentence. In April Mutawwa'in arrested 26 Christians in successive raids on 2 private houses and handed them over to the Mubahith or investigative arm of the Ministry of Interior. After 2 days, 23 of the Christians were released, but 3 of them (1 Sudanese and 2 Sri Lankans) remained in prison until September 5, and then were released without charge. They subsequently were informed by their Saudi sponsors that they had to leave the country and not return to their work. In late May, police in Jeddah imprisoned 11 Ethiopian and Eritrean Christians accused of practicing their religion in their homes. By early September all of them had been released and deported.

The Government did not permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country for the purpose of conducting religious services, although some came under other auspices. Such restrictions made it very difficult for most non-Muslims to maintain contact with clergymen and attend services. Catholics and Orthodox Christians, who require a priest on a regular basis to receive the sacraments required by their faith, particularly were affected.

Proselytizing by non-Muslims, including the distribution of non-Muslim religious materials such as Bibles, was illegal. There were no reports during the year of arrests for proselytizing. Muslims or non-Muslims wearing religious symbols of any kind in public risked confrontation with the Mutawwa'in. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, approximately 50 so-called "Call and Guidance" centers employing approximately 500 citizens to convert foreigners to Islam. Some non-Muslim foreigners converted to Islam during their stay in the country, including more than 200 persons in Jeddah each year. The press often carried articles about such conversions, including testimonials.

Under the Hanbali interpretation of Shari'a law, judges may discount the testimony of persons who are not practicing Muslims or who do not adhere to the correct doctrine. Legal sources reported that testimony by Shi'a is often ignored in courts of law or is deemed to have less weight than testimony by Sunnis. For example, in 2001 a judge in the eastern province asked two witnesses to an automobile accident if they were Shi'a. When they so confirmed, the judge announced to the court that their testimony was inadmissible. Sentencing under the legal system was not uniform. Laws and regulations state that defendants should be treated equally; however, under Shari'a as interpreted and applied in the country, crimes against Muslims may result in harsher penalties than those against non-Muslims.

Islamic religious education was mandatory in public schools at all levels. All children received religious instruction, which generally was limited to that of the Hanbali school of Islam.

In accordance with Shari'a, Saudi women were prohibited from marrying non-Muslims, but Saudi men may marry Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims.

The Government required noncitizens to carry Iqamas, or legal resident identity cards, which contained a religious designation for "Muslim" or "non-Muslim."

Shi'a citizens are discriminated against in government and employment, especially in national security jobs. Shi'a are subjected to employment restrictions in the oil and petrochemical industries and some Shi'a who are suspected of subversion have been subjected periodically to surveillance and limitations on travel abroad. Since beginning the investigation of the 1996 bombing of a U.S. military installation, authorities have detained, interrogated, and confiscated the passports of a number of Shi'a, including Shi'a returning to the country following travel to Iran (see Sections 1.d. and 2.d.). Additionally, the courts will not accept a member of the Shi'a faith as a witness in a trial.

In 2000 rioting by members of the Makarama Ismaili Shi'a eventually led to an attack by an armed group of Shi'a led to extended gun battles with security forces between the two sides.

Children of Saudi fathers are considered Muslim, and reportedly are coerced to conform to their father's interpretation of Islam. However, no cases were reported during the year.

For a more detailed discussion see the 2002 International Religious Freedom Report.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Government restricted these rights. The Government restricted the travel of citizen women. All women in the country were prohibited from driving and were dependent upon males for any transportation. Likewise, they must obtain written permission from their closest male relative before the authorities allowed them to travel abroad (see Section 5). The requirement to obtain permission from a male relative or guardian applied also to foreign women married to citizens or to the minor and single adult daughters of Saudi fathers. In 2001, the Government announced that women could obtain their own identity cards; however, it required that they obtain permission to receive a card from their nearest male relatives. Moreover, the identity cards have not been made mandatory for women (see Section 5). The restrictions on travel also applied to American citizen children of Saudi fathers. In cases where there were custody disputes between American women and their Saudi husbands, the husband was able to prevent the travel of the children to the United States even when there was a valid U.S. custody order. These restrictions on travel can continue even after the children reach adulthood, although the Government has worked with U.S. consular officials to overcome a father or husband's refusal to permit the travel of adult American citizen female relatives. During the year, senior officials indicated a willingness to allow adult American citizen women to travel despite objections by their husband or other male relative. However, by year's end, the policy had not been implemented.

Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, some Shi'a suspected of subversion have been subjected periodically to surveillance and limitations on travel abroad. In 2001 the Government lifted the requirement that citizens intending to travel to Iran seek permission in advance from authorities.

There was a high increase in tourism, especially religious tourism by Shi'ites from Saudi Arabia to Iran. The change corresponded with improving relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Advance permission for travel to Iraq, whether for business or religious pilgrimage, has been necessary for some time due to security concerns, but such travel remained possible. Travel to Iraq still required specific permission.

Foreigners typically were allowed to reside or work in the country only under the sponsorship of a citizen or business. By law the sponsors or employers of foreign residents must hold their passports until they are prepared to depart the country. The Government required foreign residents to carry identification cards. It did not permit foreigners to change their workplace without their sponsor's permission.

Stateless "bidoons" continued moving and living nomadically around the northern border. Bidoons are Arabs who have residency ties to the country—some going back generations, some for briefer periods—but who have no conclusive documentation of their nationality. Bidoons were given Iqamas by the Government but not passports and had difficulty in obtaining visas for foreign travel.

Sponsors generally retained possession of foreign workers' passports, although some classes of foreign workers were allowed to keep their passports. Foreign workers must obtain permission from their sponsors to travel abroad. If sponsors were involved in a commercial or labor dispute with foreign employees, they may ask the authorities to prohibit the employees from departing the country until the dispute is resolved. Some sponsors used this as a pressure tactic to resolve disputes in their favor or to have foreign employees deported. There were numerous reports of the Government prohibiting foreign employees involved in labor disputes from departing the country until the dispute was resolved (see Sections 5 and 6.c.).

The Government seized the passports of all potential suspects and witnesses in criminal cases and suspended the issuance of exit visas to them until the case was concluded. As a result, some foreign nationals were forced to remain in the country for lengthy periods against their will. The authorities sometimes confiscated the passports of suspected oppositionists and their families.

Citizens may emigrate. The Government prohibited dual citizenship; however, children who hold other citizenship by virtue of birth abroad increasingly were permitted to leave the country using non-Saudi passports. Apart from marriage to a citizen, there were no provisions for foreign residents to acquire citizenship. Children born to a citizen father acquired Saudi citizenship. However, a citizen mother may not convey citizenship to her children. Foreigners were granted citizenship in rare cases, generally through the advocacy of an influential patron.

The law does not provide for the granting of asylum and refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

The Basic Law provides that "the state will grant political asylum if the public interest militates in favor of it." The law does not specify clear rules for adjudicating asylum cases, and does not provide for first asylum. In general the authorities regarded refugees and displaced persons similarly as they did foreign workers. They must have sponsors for employment or risk expulsion. Of the 33,000 Iraqi civilians and former prisoners of war allowed refuge in the country at the end of the Gulf War, none have been granted permanent asylum. Nevertheless, the Government cooperated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It has underwritten the entire cost of providing safe haven to the Iraqi refugees and continued to provide logistical and administrative support to the UNHCR and other resettlement agencies. At year's end, approximately 27,000 of the original 33,000 Iraqi refugees had been resettled in other countries or voluntarily repatriated to Iraq. Most of the approximately 5,200 remaining refugees were restricted to the Rafha Refugee Camp. At year's end, following the visit to the Rafha Refugee Camp by the UNCHR, efforts were still being made to find asylum for approximately 3,000 refugees who wished to leave the camp but not return to Iraq. According to the UNHCR, the Government has agreed that the remaining 2,200 be given continuing refuge and possible employment in the area until they could be repatriated safely to Iraq. In October the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees visited the Rafha camp and later reported that during his visit, the refugees staged a peaceful protest and complained about the lack of freedom, movement, and prospects for the future. The UNHCR has monitored more than 3,000 persons voluntarily returning to Iraq from Rafha since December 1991 and found no evidence of forcible repatriation (see Section 1.c.).

The Government has allowed some foreigners to remain temporarily in the country in cases in which their safety would be jeopardized if they were deported to their home countries.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

Citizens did not have the right to change their Government. There were no formal democratic institutions, and only a few members of the ruling family had a voice in the choice of leaders or in changing the political system. The King ruled on civil and religious matters within certain limitations established by religious law, tradition, and the need to maintain consensus among the ruling family and religious leaders.

The King is also the Prime Minister, and the Crown Prince served as Deputy Prime Minister. The King appointed all other

ministers, who in turn appointed subordinate officials with cabinet concurrence. In 1992 the King appointed 60 members to a Consultative Council, or Majlis Ash-Shura. This strictly advisory body began to hold sessions in 1993. In 1997 and again in May the King expanded the membership of the Council; it has 120 members plus its chairman. There were two Shi'as on the Council. The Council engaged in debates that, while closed to the general public, provided advice and views occasionally contrary to the Government's proposed policy or recommended course of action. The Government usually incorporated the Majlis' advice into its final policy announcements or tried to convince it why the Government's policy was correct. In November the Majlis Ash-Shura publicly announced that it wanted to play more than its limited advisory role. The Majlis sought to have more power to cope with modern developments and to make it more effective. However, also in November, local press reported a meeting in which the governors and the Minister of Interior of the country's regions signaled a reaffirmation of royal power. All but 1 of the country's 13 governors are either sons or grandsons of King Abdulaziz, the founder of the country.

The Council of Senior Islamic Scholars (ulema) is another advisory body to the King and the Cabinet. It reviews the Government's public policies for compliance with Shari'a. The Government viewed the Council as an important source of religious legitimacy and takes the Council's opinions into account when promulgating legislation.

Communication between citizens and the Government usually was expressed through client-patron relationships and by affinity groups such as tribes, families, and professional hierarchies. In theory any male citizen or foreign national may express an opinion or a grievance at a majlis, an open-door meeting held by the King, a prince, or an important national or local official. However, as governmental functions have become more complex, time-consuming, and centralized, public access to senior officials became more restricted. Since the assassination of King Faisal in 1975, kings have reduced the frequency of their personal contacts with the public. However, in 2001 and during the year, Crown Prince Abdullah held a variety of meetings with citizens throughout the country. Ministers and district governors can be approached for discussion at a majlis.

Typical topics raised in a majlis include complaints about bureaucratic delay or insensitivity, requests for personal redress or assistance, and criticism of particular acts of government affecting family welfare. Broader "political" concerns—social, economic, or foreign policy—rarely were raised. Complaints about royal abuses of power were not entertained. In general journalists, academics, and businessmen believed that institutionalized avenues of domestic criticism of the regime were closed. Feedback was filtered through private personal channels and has affected various policy issues, including the Middle East peace process, youth unemployment, and the construction of new infrastructure.

The Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR), established in 1993, and its rival faction, the Islamic Reform Movement, established in 1996, continued to criticize the Government, using computers and fax transmissions to send newsletters from London to the country. Both were repressed by the Government and have no officially recognized existence.

Women played no formal role in government and politics and were actively discouraged from doing so. Participation by women in a majlis was restricted, although some women sought redress through female members of the royal family. On rare occasions, women have been called to advise members of the Majlis Ash-Shura in private, closed-door sessions.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

There were no publicly active human rights groups, and the Government has made it clear that none critical of government policies would be permitted.

In October a U.N. Human Rights envoy visited the country at the invitation of the Government. The local press covered the visit of the U.N. Special Rapporteur as he reviewed the judicial system. The visit by the U.N. Human Rights envoy followed the government-implementation of the new Saudi Criminal Procedural Bill of Rights. In the past, the Government also has announced publicly through the press, that it would welcome visits from other human rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

During the year, a citizen formerly imprisoned for his political views moved freely in the country trying to establish an NGO called Human Rights First—the Society For Protecting and Defending Human Rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Representing a group of 12 citizens, the organizer petitioned senior government officials to allow the establishment of this first NGO.

The Government disagreed with internationally accepted definitions of human rights and viewed its interpretation of Islamic law as the only necessary guide to protect human rights. The Government generally ignored citations of government human rights abuses by international monitors or foreign governments and in the past has criticized such citations as attacks on Islam.

The Government maintained that the new Criminal Procedural law regarding rights of prisoners and punitive measures will address its obligations under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In February the Government announced in the national press that it would establish two human rights commissions, one governmental and the other nongovernmental. In April, at the meeting of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, the Government announced that it was in the final stages of establishing these commissions. The press also publicized that the Government had signed four out of six international human rights covenants and was planning to sign the remaining two soon. Since May there were no indications of the law's implementation for prisoners, especially victims of human

rights abuses, held in government prisons.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

There was legal and systemic discrimination based on sex. The law forbids discrimination based on race, but not nationality, although such discrimination occurs. The Government and private organizations cooperated in providing services for persons with disabilities; however, there is no legislation mandating public access. The Shi'a minority suffered social, legal, economic, and political discrimination (see section 2.c.). While rare, there were occasional reports that religious police have arrested and punished men for engaging in homosexual activity. Punishments included lashes, prison sentences, and deportation of expatriates.

Women

Shari'a prohibits abuse and violence against all innocent persons, including women. The Government did not keep statistics on spousal abuse or other forms of violence against women. However, based on the information available regarding physical spousal abuse and violence against women, such violence and abuse appeared to be common problems. Hospital workers reported that many women were admitted for treatment of injuries that apparently resulted from spousal violence; hospitals now are required to report any suspicious injuries to authorities. A citizen may prevent his wife and any child or unmarried adult daughter from obtaining an exit visa to depart the country (see Section 2.d.).

Foreign embassies continued to receive many reports that employers abused foreign women working as domestic servants. Some embassies of countries with large domestic servant populations maintained safehouses to which their citizens may flee to escape work situations that included forced confinement, withholding of food, beating and other physical abuse, and rape. Often the reported abuse is at the hands of female citizens. During the year, the media reported more frequently on cases involving domestic abuse of women, servants, and children. However, in general the Government considered such cases to be family matters and did not intervene unless charges of abuse were brought to its attention. It was almost impossible for foreign women to obtain redress in the courts due to the courts' strict evidentiary rules and the women and servants' own fears of reprisals. During the year, there were increasing reports of employers being punished for abuse of domestic servants. There were no private support groups or religious associations to assist such women.

By religious law and social custom, women have the right to own property and are entitled to financial support from their husbands or male relatives. However, women have few political or social rights and are not treated as equal members of society. There were no active women's rights groups. Women legally may not drive motor vehicles and are restricted in their use of public facilities when men are present. Women must enter city buses by separate rear entrances and sit in specially designated sections. Women risked arrest by the Mutawwa'in for riding in a vehicle driven by a male who was not an employee or a close male relative. Women were not admitted to a hospital for medical treatment without the consent of a male relative. By law and custom, women may not undertake domestic or foreign travel alone (see Section 2.d.). During the year, the Government began again to issue national identity cards to females, despite a national campaign by some religious conservatives against it. In November the press reported the Interior Minister as suggesting that it was not absolutely necessary that a male guardian accompany a woman applying for an ID as long as she could produce documentary evidence of her identity.

In public a woman was expected to wear an abaya (a black garment that covers the entire body) and also to cover her head and hair. The Mutawwa'in generally expected women from Arab countries, and other countries in Asia and Africa to comply more fully with local customs of dress than they do Western women; nonetheless, in recent years they have instructed Western women to wear the abaya and cover their hair and face. During the year, Mutawwa'in continued to admonish and harass women to wear their abayas and cover their hair.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports during the year of government officials and ministries barring accredited female diplomats in the country from official meetings or placing other restrictions on them.

There is no law specifically prohibiting female genital mutilation (FGM), and it was practiced among some foreign workers from East Africa and the Nile Valley. It was not always clear whether the procedure occurred in the country or the workers' home countries.

Prostitution is illegal and did not appear to be a widespread problem.

Women also are subject to discrimination under Shari'a as interpreted in the country, which stipulates that daughters receive half the inheritance awarded to their brothers. While Shari'a provides women with a basis to own and dispose of property independently, women often are constrained from asserting such rights because of various legal and societal barriers, especially regarding employment and freedom of movement. In a Shari'a court, the testimony of one man equals that of two women (see Section 1.e.). Although Islamic law permits polygyny, with up to four wives, it is becoming less common due to demographic and economic changes. Islamic law enjoins a man to treat each wife equally. In practice such equality is left to the discretion of the husband. Some women participated in Al-Mesyar (or "short daytime visit") marriages, or what are described as "weekend marriages," in which the women relinquished their legal rights to financial support and nighttime cohabitation. Additionally, the husband was not required to inform his other wives of the marriage, and any children resulting from such a

marriage have no inheritance rights. The Government placed greater restrictions on women than on men regarding marriage to noncitizens and non-Muslims (see Section 1.f.).

Women must demonstrate legally specified grounds for divorce, but men may divorce without giving cause. In doing so, men were required to pay immediately an amount of money agreed upon at the time of the marriage, which serves as a one-time alimony payment. Women who demonstrate legal grounds for divorce still were entitled to this alimony. If divorced or widowed, a Muslim woman normally may keep her children until they attain a specified age: 7 years for boys; 9 years for girls. Children over these ages are awarded to the divorced husband or the deceased husband's family. Numerous divorced foreign women continued to be prevented by their former husbands from visiting their children after divorce.

Women had access to free but segregated education through the university level. They constituted more than 58 percent of all university students, but were excluded from studying such subjects as engineering, journalism, and architecture. Men may study overseas; women may do so only if accompanied by a spouse or an immediate male relative.

Women made up approximately 14.6 percent of the formal citizen work force. Unemployment among women was approximately 15.8 percent. Saudi women reportedly owned approximately 20 percent of the businesses, although they must deputize a male relative to represent them in financial transactions. Most employment opportunities for women were in education and health care. Despite limited educational opportunities in many professional fields, some female citizens were able to study abroad and return to work in professions such as architecture and journalism. Many foreign women worked as domestic servants and nurses.

Women who wished to enter nontraditional fields were subject to discrimination. Women may not accept jobs in rural areas if there are no adult male kin present with whom they may reside and who agree to take responsibility for them. Most workplaces in which women were present are segregated by gender. Frequently, contact with male supervisors or clients was allowed only by telephone or fax machine. According to the Ministry of Commerce, women were not eligible to be issued business licenses for work in fields that might require them to supervise foreign workers, interact with male clients, or deal on a regular basis with government officials. However, in hospital settings and in the energy industry, women and men worked together, and, in some instances, women supervised male employees. Some women and men continued to seek opportunities for women and to break down gender segregation. In May according to the press, the Justice Minister announced that the Government was considering opening the legal profession to women, but not allowing females to appear in court before judges.

During the year, the Government began to deal with discrimination based on gender when it responded to public outrage over the girls' school fire in Mecca by dissolving the separate Presidency for Girls' Education and incorporating women's education into the Ministry of Education, eliminating women's education from control of religious authorities. Increasingly, the press covered issues concerning women's rights and gender discrimination.

Children

The Government provided all children with free education and medical care. Children were not subject to the strict social segregation faced by women although they were segregated by sex in schools, beginning at the age of 7; however, schools were integrated through the fourth grade in some areas. By age 9, most children were segregated by sex in school. In more general social situations, boys were segregated at the age of 12 and girls at the onset of puberty.

It was difficult to gauge the prevalence of child abuse, since the Government keeps no national statistics on such cases. Although in general the culture greatly prizes children, new studies by Saudi female doctors indicated that severe abuse and neglect of children appeared to be more widespread than previously reported. In February doctors, dentists, academics, and socially concerned citizens held a conference on the topic of Child Abuse, including physical abuse of women, and launched a nationwide campaign to raise public awareness. The press has also played an important role in beginning to raise national consciousness about the widespread problem. In February the Government announced that it is planning to establish a special unit within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to address child abuse. This new governmental department will handle abuse at home and "protect women and children in particular from being subjected to mental and physical abuse by other family members."

Trafficking in children for forced begging persisted (see Sections 6.c. and 6.f.).

Persons with Disabilities

The law provides hiring quotas for persons with disabilities. There is no legislation that mandates public accessibility; however, newer commercial buildings often include such access, as do some newer government buildings. The provision of government social services increasingly has brought persons with disabilities into the public mainstream. The Government and private charitable organizations cooperated in education, employment, and other services for persons with disabilities.

During the year the Government took a variety of steps promoting more rights and elimination of discrimination against persons with disabilities. In January the press publicized a study conducted by the National Project on Disability and Rehabilitation Research that found a total of 493,605 disabled persons in the country. Of that number, representing 4 percent of the population, 34 percent have some form of body disabilities and 30 percent have sight disabilities. In May the Government

announced the formation of an endowment committee for handicapped children. In July the Government established a new supreme council to deal with the affairs of the disabled and the Crown Prince was named as chairman. In September the press announced a plan to open a chapter of Best Buddies International, an NGO to help persons with mental disabilities, which would be the first such operation in the country.

Foreign criminal rings reportedly bought and imported children with disabilities for the purpose of forced begging (see Sections 6.c. and 6.f.).

Police generally transported mentally ill persons found wandering alone in public to their families or a hospital. Police claimed that according to Islam, family members should be taking care of such individuals.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Although racial discrimination is illegal, there was substantial societal prejudice based on ethnic or national origin. Foreign workers from Africa and Asia were subject to various forms of formal and informal discrimination and have the most difficulty in obtaining justice for their grievances. For example, pay scales for identical or similar labor or professional services were set by nationality such that two similarly qualified and experienced foreign nationals performing the same employment duties receive varied compensation based on their nationalities.

In November Crown Prince Abdullah issued a call for a national strategy to eliminate poverty. In a widely publicized visit to the homes of poor citizens living in dilapidated districts, the Crown Prince was quoted as saying, "we have to admit this problem and implement the strategy immediately." One week later, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs established an Anti-Poverty Fund and announced the formation of a strategy to tackle the problem.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Government prohibited the establishment of labor unions; however, in April the Minister of Labor endorsed the plans announced in 2001 for the establishment of labor committees for citizens in local companies, including factories, having more than 100 employees. The aim will be the establishment of communication between employees and employers and the improvement of work standards in the workplace. In May the Ministry of Labor announced that it was continuing with its plans to establish labor committees in private establishments. The press reported that the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry held the first introductory meeting of labor committees. Ministry legal experts issued public statements denying foreign pressure to establish such labor committees. The labor committees are to consist of three to nine members, who would serve 3-year terms. The Government has no role in selecting the committee members; both management and workers will be represented. The committee may make recommendations to company management to improve work conditions, increase productivity, improve health and safety, and recommend training programs. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs may send a representative to attend committee meetings. A committee must provide a written report of its meetings to company management, which also will be transmitted to the Ministry. The Ministry may dissolve a labor committee if it violates regulations or threatens public security. Foreign workers may not form or become members of labor committees. No committees existed by year's end.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Collective bargaining was forbidden. Foreign workers comprised approximately two-thirds of the work force. There was no minimum wage; wages were set by employers and varied according to the type of work performed and the nationality of the worker (see Section 5).

Strikes were prohibited; however, in March more than 450 hospital cleaners at the Military Hospital in Riyadh staged a strike to protest a 2-month delay in payment of their salaries by the contracting company. They returned to work when the company officials agreed to pay 1 month's salary immediately and the other in the near future. In 2000 in Jeddah, foreign hospital, food processing, and construction workers who had not been paid staged strikes. In 1995 the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation suspended coverage because of the Government's lack of compliance with internationally recognized worker rights standards.

There were no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Government prohibited forced or bonded labor pursuant to a royal decree that abolished slavery. Ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions 29 and 105, which prohibit forced labor, gives them the force of law. However, employers had significant control over the movements of foreign employees, which gave rise to situations that sometimes involved forced labor, especially in remote areas where workers were unable to leave their place of work.

In September the Ministry of Interior reported that the government system of sponsorship of expatriate workers has come under national scrutiny. However, the Minister, however, said the Government is not yet ready to abrogate the current system of sponsorship until it has been fully studied and a better system for controlling the expatriate labor force has been presented and accepted.

Some sponsors prevented foreign workers from obtaining exit visas to pressure them to sign a new work contract or to drop claims against their employers for unpaid salary (see Section 2.d.). Additionally, some sponsors refused to provide foreign workers with a "letter of no objection" that would allow them to be employed by another sponsor. The authorities in some cases forced maids fleeing abusive employment circumstances to return to their employers.

There were many reports of workers whose employers refused to pay several months, or even years, of accumulated salary or other promised benefits. Foreign workers with such grievances, except foreign domestic servants, had the right to complain before the labor courts, but few did so because of fear of deportation. The labor system was conducive to the exploitation of foreign workers because enforcement of work contracts was difficult and generally favors employers. Labor courts, while generally fair, may take many months to reach a final appellate ruling, during which time the employer may prevent the foreign laborer from leaving the country. An employer also may delay a case until a worker's funds are exhausted, and the worker is forced to return to his home country.

The law does not specifically prohibit forced or bonded labor by children. Nonetheless, with the rare exception of criminal begging rings, and the possible exceptions of family businesses, forced or bonded child labor did not occur (see Section 6.d.). In 1997 the Government attempted to eradicate forced child begging. Nevertheless, criminal rings consisting almost exclusively of foreigners have continued to buy and import South Asian and African children for the purpose of forced begging (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is 13 years, which may be waived by the Ministry of Labor with the consent of the juvenile's guardian. There is no minimum age for workers employed in family-oriented businesses or in other areas that are construed as extensions of the household, such as farming, herding, and domestic service.

Children under the age of 18 may not be employed in hazardous or harmful industries, such as mining or industries employing power-operated machinery. While there is no formal government entity responsible for enforcing the minimum age for employment of children, the Ministry of Justice has jurisdiction and has acted as plaintiff in the few cases that have arisen against alleged violators. However, in general children played a minimal role in the work force.

In April the press publicized stories about the Mecca Municipality's efforts to end a child-labor racket in Mecca. The majority of child beggars are citizens, many of them girls with disabilities, according to an ILO study reported in the press in September. The new figures contrasted sharply with previous claims by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs that only 25 percent of the children begging were citizens. The Ministry has established special offices in both Mecca and Medina to combat the growing problem of child beggars.

The law does not prohibit specifically forced or bonded labor by children, but it was not a problem, with the rare exception of forced child begging rings, and possibly family businesses (see Section 6.c.). Reportedly, young boys of Saudi, Sudanese, South Asian, and Yemeni origin were used as jockeys in camel races.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legal minimum wage. Labor regulations establish a 48-hour workweek at regular pay and allow employers to require up to 12 additional hours of overtime at time-and-a-half pay. Labor law provides for a 24-hour rest period, normally on Fridays, although the employer may grant it on another day. The average wage generally provides a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

The ILO has stated that the Government did not formulated legislation implementing the ILO Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration and that regulations that segregated work places by sex or limit vocational programs for women violated ILO Convention 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation.

Workers risked losing employment if they remove themselves from hazardous work conditions.

Labor regulations require employers to protect most workers from job-related hazards and disease. However, foreign nationals reported frequent failures to enforce health and safety standards. Farmers, herdsmen, domestic servants, and workers in family-operated businesses were not covered by these regulations.

Some foreign nationals who have been recruited abroad have claimed that after their arrival in the country, they were presented with work contracts that specified lower wages and fewer benefits than originally promised. Other foreign workers reportedly have signed contracts in their home countries and later were pressured to sign less favorable contracts upon arrival. Some

employees reported that at the end of their contract service, their employers refused to grant permission to allow them to return home. Foreign employees involved in disputes with their employers may find their freedom of movement restricted (see Section 2.d.). The labor laws, including those designed to limit working hours and regulate working conditions, do not apply to foreign domestic servants, and such domestic servants may not seek the protection of the labor courts. There were credible reports that female domestic servants sometimes were forced to work 16 to 20 hours per day 7 days per week. There were numerous confirmed reports of maids fleeing employers and seeking refuge in their embassies (see Section 5). Foreign embassies continued to receive reports of employers abusing domestic servants. Such abuse included withholding of food, beatings and other physical abuse, and rape (see Section 5). The Government's figures for 1999 stated that 7,000 maids fled their place of employment, and the actual number presumably was higher. In 2001 the media reported additional stories of such incidents. The authorities in some cases forced such maids to return to their places of employment.

The ongoing campaign to remove illegal immigrants from the country has done little to Saudiize the economy because illegal immigrants largely worked in low-income positions, which most citizens considered unsuitable. The Government carried out the campaign by widely publicizing its enforcement of existing laws against illegal immigrants and citizens employing or sponsoring illegal immigrants. Since 1999 as many as 1.1 million persons departed or were deported for violating residence and labor laws, under the terms of a 1997 amnesty, which allows illegal immigrants and their employers or sponsors to avoid the possibility of prosecution by voluntarily seeking expeditious repatriation.

The effect of the expeditious repatriation of some illegal immigrants and the legalization of others has been to improve overall working conditions for legally employed foreigners. Illegal immigrants generally were willing to accept lower salaries and fewer benefits than legally employed immigrants. The departure or legalization of illegal workers reduced the competition for certain jobs and thereby reduced the incentive for legal immigrants to accept lower wages and fewer benefits as a means of competing with illegal immigrants. Furthermore, their departure or legalization removed a large portion of the class of workers most vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because of their illegal status.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit specifically trafficking in persons; however, the law prohibits slavery and the smuggling of persons into the country. In August the press reported that the Council of Ministers approved two international protocols on trafficking in persons, one that combats the smuggling of immigrants by land, sea, or air and the other that seeks to prevent trade in persons, especially women and children.

Criminal rings consisting almost exclusively of foreigners have bought and imported South Asian children, including children with disabilities, and women for the purpose of organized begging, particularly in the vicinity of the Grand Mosque in Mecca during Islamic holidays.

There were unconfirmed reports that women were trafficked into the country to work as prostitutes.

Among the millions of foreign workers in the country, some persons, particularly domestic workers, are defrauded by employment agencies or exploited by employers; some workers overstay their contracts and are exploited as they have few legal protections. Many foreign domestic servants fled work situations that included forced confinement, beating and other physical abuse, withholding of food, and rape. The authorities often forced domestic servants to return to their places of employment (see Sections 5 and 6.c.).

During the year, the Government acknowledged trafficking problems in terms of abuse of domestic servants, especially female expatriate workers. The press carried a number of stories on problems and issues related to abuse of maids and other domestic workers. The media campaign appeared to be an effort to begin raising national awareness about the problem. Government officials indicated that they wished to begin taking actions to counter the problems of trafficking, which involved abuse of expatriate domestic workers. The Ministry of Labor has formed an internal committee that is preparing an educational program to advise foreign domestic workers of their rights for recourse to authorities if they experience abuse or nonpayment of wages.

In October the Council of Ministers issued a mandate delegating the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs as they oversee for all work visas, including seasonal labor. In November the Government granted a transition period of 6 months to the Labor Ministry to assume full responsibility for the granting of work visas to expatriates.

Also in November, the Government ordered that all private recruitment offices must adopt a standard commitment contract in their dealings with foreign recruiters sending labor to the country. The press reported that the new labor contract would become mandatory December 19.